Fifty Miles in a Local Freight Train

By HOMER KINGSLEY

This is the third of several stories on interesting facts having to do with the operation of a railroad. The next will appear in an early issue.

"SIXTY-EIGHT double O four, ninety-three ball fourteen, two stock and two thirty-ton box set out. We go in the hole for four."

This seeming jargon of meaningless words is what the conductor of the local freight said to the brakeman. It sounded queer, but by the trainman it was perfectly understood.

This is what we would have had to say, had we been trying to say the same thing. "We 'set out' a box car No. 68004, loaded with coal; a flat car No. 93014, loaded with lumber; two empty stock cars, two empty 60,000-pound capacity box cars and then after doing all this work we are to back into the siding to let passenger train No. 4 go by."

There are several peddlers on the freight train. No, they are not the flesh and blood kind with whiskers and hampers and greasy palms, they are cars that contain mixed freight for stations along the line. These cars are opened, loaded or unloaded, at every station and so they are called "peddlers."

These "peddlers" are always near the caboose.

Here is an average freight train of 26 cars. Beginning at the caboose, there are the six "peddler" cars, five empty stock cars, eight empty box cars, two cars of lumber, two cars of gravel, one car of railroad ties, and three cars of coal.

The empties are distributed at stations for stock and grain. The lumber and coal are also "set out" at different stations, as they have been called for. The gravel and ties are material that belongs to the company and are to be unloaded along the line somewhere.

The conductor has checked over his train before he started and made sure that everything was the same as given in the waybills. He has made a record of each car and the seal numbers on each car door.

When the freight stops at the station, he hands the bills to the agent, who makes his own record of the seal numbers of the cars before the seals are broken and the door opened. Then the freight in the "peddlers" is checked over and the deliveries made or added and the doors sealed again and the train proceeds to the next station.

As the train makes its run it grows "light." Most of the freight has been left, but then some new freight is added to the "peddler" cars. These cars are taken to the terminals and switched to the big freight houses and their contents shifted about and transferred so that everything will go to its destination. Of course, loaded cars are picked up. There are grain, machinery, and wood; and perhaps fruit that is shipped in a refrigerator car.

As the train travels along the conductor reads a train order to the brakeman: "Train No. 93 will leave two cars of gravel on main line at culvert 446-73. Train No. 94 will pick up the empties." This is fairly plain to a tenderfoot. Two cars of gravel are to be left by our train at this culvert to be loaded by the section men and the local freight, running in the opposite direction, will pick up the empty cars and take them to the station.

Both trains receive this order and the station on each side of the culvert also has a copy of the order. Any train approaching these stations would find the semaphore arm at "stop," and would get a copy of an order reading, "Cars on the main line at culvert 446-73."

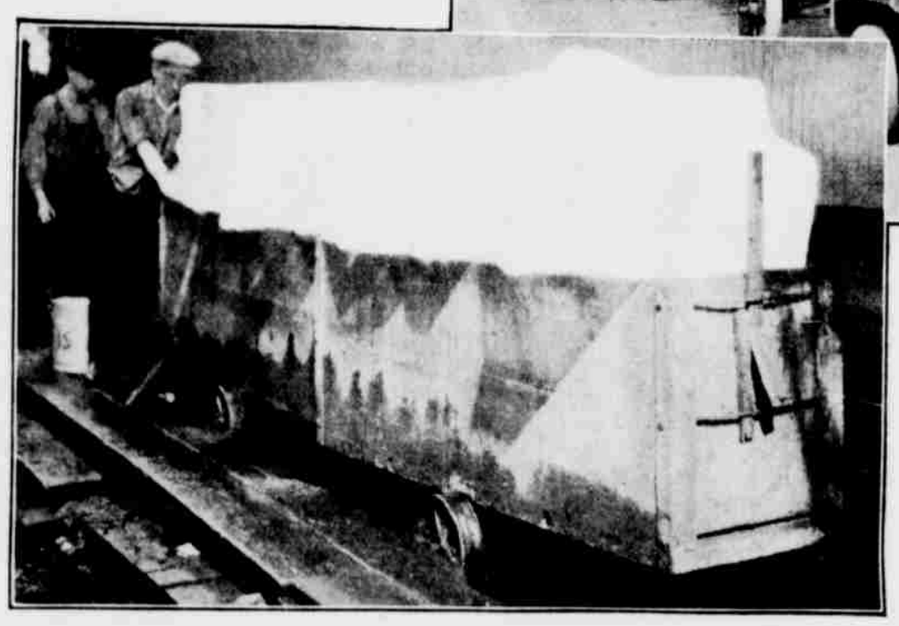
But train No. 94 brings these cars in before any train reaches these stations. This is expected, and is what the train dispatcher expected when he made out the orders. But he sent out the other requests merely as a matter of precaution. The culvert is numbered and the 446-73 means it is 446 miles from the general terminal and the 73 is 73/100 miles. All bridges and culverts are so marked.

Reaching the next station the conductor reads the telegram which says, "Run slow, blank to blank, for section men to unload ties."

This means that the section men will go along with the train and while the freight is pulling along slowly the men will throw off the ties. When the car is empty the men get out and go back on the little hand car they have fastened on behind.

At the end of the run is the great city freight house. The freight sheds of one railway at Chicago are half a mile long, with a covered shed extending another quarter mile. This is the "out" freight house, from where the freight going from the city is received. The "in" freight house is nearly as large.

The doors and cars are all labeled with the names of the stations for which freight will be loaded. At this great freight house there is an average of 600 cars of freight loaded each day. By means of electrically propelled motor trucks they haul the loaded trucks that contain the freight. The "checkers" load up the trucks and hand the "trucker" a small card with the number of the car in which he is to place the freight.



Above—The day of the old-time baggage "smasher" and freight "banger" is gone. Instead the baggage is now handled on big trucks drawn by a little electric tractor which is operated by one man.

Left—The fruit and provision cars have to be reloaded with ice for their refrigerators during the hot weather. Ice also is used in the passenger cars for drinking water. These men have a large cake that they are cutting for the water tank.

The loading is well systematized. The "peddler" cars are filled to the roof. The freight men have a list of the stations and on which side of the track they are, so they load the material accordingly and on the side that will make it easiest to remove. The freight cars are also connected according to order.

After the loading is finished the switch engines pull out the cars and place them in trains for departure. Then there are the manifest, or through trains. These are handled separately. They are sent to the division points, from where they are distributed by the local freights.

John G. Neihardt, Poet Laureate of Nebraska

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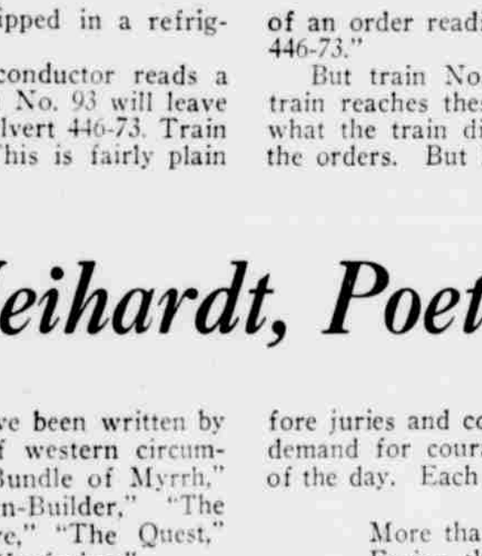
Many other poems and stories have been written by Mr. Neihardt embodying a chain of western circumstance: "The Lonesome Trail," "A Bundle of Myrrh," "The River and I," "The Dawn-Builder," "The Stranger at the Gate," "Life's Lure," "The Quest," "Two Mothers" and "The Splendid Wayfaring."

Contemporaries have risen to pay tribute. The Yale *Review* "fervently prays that these songs may take rank with, if not precedence over, Scott and Tennyson in our schools." Local Neihardtian literary clubs, have been started in several cities and a national organization bearing his name was founded two years ago. Dr. John T. House, a graduate of Chicago University and an intimate friend, has written the poet's biography. The University of Nebraska in 1917, conferred on him the degree of Litterarum Doctor and in 1919 he was awarded the Poetry Society's prize, for the best poem of the year, "The Song of Three Friends." This is another epic of western pioneer life which in chronological order antedates the story revealed in, "The Song of Hugh Glass."



A bust of the poet done by his wife.

Mr. Neihardt points out that the great American epos was developed west of the Missouri River during the nineteenth century, beginning in 1822 and ending in 1890, and he regards the body of legends that grew up about the heroes of that time as "precious saga-stuff." His "Song of Three Friends" and "The Song of Hugh Glass" are historical prose epics dealing with this period, and he is now engaged on a third piece of the cycle, "The Song of the Indian Wars." He believes that the work still to be written by him will require another 15 years.

Probably no single poem has been more quoted before juries and conventions than, "Battle Cry." It is a demand for courage in solving the complex problems of the day. Each generation must meet its battles:

More than half beaten, but fearless,
Facing the storm and the night;
Breathless and reeling, but tearless,
Here in the lull of the fight,
I who bow not but before Thee,
God of the fighting Clan,
Lifting my fists I implore Thee,
Give me the heart of a Man!

What though I live with the winners
Or perish with those who fall?
Only the cowards are sinners,
Fighting the fight is all.
Strong is my Foe—he advances!
Snapt is my blade, O Lord!
See the proud banners and lances!
Oh spare me this stub of a sword!

Give me no pity, nor spare me;
Calm not the wrath of my Foe.
See where he beckons to dare me!
Bleeding, half beaten—I go.
Not for the glory of winning,
Not for the fear of the night;
Shunning the battle is sinning—
Oh spare me the heart to fight!

Red is the mist about me;
Deep is the wound in my side;
"Coward" thou criest to flout me?
O terrible Foe, thou hast lied!
Here with my battle before me,
God of the fighting Clan,
Grant that the woman who bore me
Suffered to suckle a Man!

Since 1912 Neihardt has been literary critic for the Minneapolis *Journal*, reading 10 books and writing seven columns each week.

At his little home built on the same lawn as the home of his aged mother, at Bancroft, Nebraska, surrounded by a wife, who is a sculptress, and three children, Mr. Neihardt spends three forenoons each week writing review criticisms. The afternoons he spends in his garden, or in winter chopping wood or reading, and with it all he keeps a reserve of energy by which he rejoices in the beauties of sky and earth, night and day, his ear attuned to the music of the birds and his mind a filming plate for poems.

Singularly enough, the Neihardt family has been a participant in the long continental migration movement described in these western poems. The original Neihardts settled in Pennsylvania in 1737, descendants of an old Bavarian family, the founder of which was ennobled by Friederich Barbarossa and given large estates near Zweibruecken. Mrs. Neihardt is a daughter of Rudolph Vincent Martinsen, a German-Russian financier, and for some years president of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad. She took her training in sculpture under the late Auguste Rodin, and some of her work was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1907. Mr. and Mrs. Neihardt were married in 1908. For them the vanities of life have few attractions.

"—As for me, a cracker box and enough food to keep me going," said Neihardt. "But half of a poet's job is that of being a real he-person, and that is one good reason why I am increasingly glad for my responsibilities. So far, I've done the trick by the simple expedient of producing necessities instead of fighting for money with which to buy them—that is, to a great degree. Soon the world will learn that money is only a medium of exchange! It has temporarily forgotten. Sometimes I have a vision of our world making industry an end instead of a means—and it is terrible.

"What am I, John Neihardt? What matters it that I or some one else should do this work. The individual must be lost in the mass. I am willing, eager to give up my ego, even the memory of my name that my work may be done."